

Study: Gen X not that concerned about climate change

By Eryn Brown Los Angeles Times

According to a survey of more than 4,000 young adults, a large proportion of Generation X isn't all that concerned about climate change.

Writing in the quarterly Generation X Report – which details findings of the Longitudinal Study of American Youth, a yearly survey of Americans who entered 7th or 10th grade in 50 U.S. public school systems in the fall of 1987 – University of Michigan research scientist Jon D. Miller said that the “surprising” results indicated that “many young adults do not see [climate change] as an immediate problem they need to address ... and that many young adults prefer to focus on more immediate issues.”

The survey identified awareness about climate change among interviewees, most of whom are now 36 or 39 years old. In 2008, the research reported, 28% of participants in the Longitudinal Study of American Youth said that they were “very interested” in climate change issues; 55% said they were “moderately interested” and 17% said they were not interested at all. That same year, 57% of respondents said they were “very interested” in the economy and in local school issues.

When asked about their levels of concern about climate change in 2009 and 2011, between a fifth and a quarter of study participants indicated a “high level” of concern, and nearly 60% considered themselves well- or moderately informed on the issue. But Gen Xers reported high levels of uncertainty and ambivalence about a series of statements about climate change included in the 2011 survey, Miller wrote.

Respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agreed, on a scale from 1 to 10, with the statements. Seventy percent “expressed mixed feelings” about the statement “If the present rate of coal and oil use continues, serious long-term environmental damage will occur,” Miller said. More than half of those either had no opinion about the statement or said they didn’t understand the issue well enough to offer an answer.

Analysis of survey responses suggested that nearly a quarter of the Gen Xers interviewed were “alarmed” or “concerned” about climate change and that about a tenth were “doubtful or dismissive” about it, the report said. That leaves two-thirds “disengaged or cautiously on the sideline.”

“The climate issue appears to attract fewer committed activists – on either side – than I would have expected,” Miller said in a statement.

The activists tended to be better educated than the disengaged respondents. People who did not have children were slightly more alarmed about climate change than parents were.

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